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FOR NEA/ARP: AMACDONALD AND INR: SMOFFAT

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SUBJECT: A VIEW FROM INSIDE THE SOUTHERN MOVEMENT

REF: SANAA 0306

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY. Moving in an increasingly secessionist direction, the leaders of the Southern Movement continue to build organizational capacity while beginning to think about confrontational strategies, according to former southern General Mohamed Saleh Tammah. The movement, which looks to southern expatriates for fiscal support and high-profile leadership, walks a fine line in its relationships with the Houthis and al-Qaeda, Yemen's other major elements of internal instability. Although Tammah seems credible, his motives bear scrutiny. END SUMMARY.

ORGANIZATION AND TACTICS

12. (S) In a March 3 meeting with PolOff, General Mohamed Saleh Tammah, vice president of Hassan Ba'um's National Conference of the Sons of the South (NCSS), provided the most detailed explanation to date of the internal development and offensive tactics of the Southern Movement (reftel). (Note: The NCSS, which seeks to unite the movement's various factions under one umbrella, has about 350 core members, according to Tammah. End Note.) Internally, the movement's leaders have worked to establish a "shadow government" ready to take the reins should the south achieve independence. Externally, the movement's most successful operation to date was the January closure of roads into Lahj, Abyan and Aden governorates, which, according to Tammah, induced the ROYG to release detainees held in connection to demonstrations on January 13. He said that the movement plans to use road closures again and has discussed the possibility of ambushing military convoys if the ROYG were to attempt to expand its presence in the southern governorates. He added that the south is flush with small arms and medium-grade weapons that could be used in an armed conflict with the regime and asserted that southerners in the Yemeni military would not fight against their southern brethren.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

13. (S) Wealthy expatriate southerners in the U.K. and Saudi Arabia fund the movement, according to Tammah. The movement has an office in London and is working to broadcast at least one new satellite television station, Aden TV, into southern Yemen to complement existing print and Web-based media. Tammah said he traveled to the U.S., U.K., Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to elicit support. He mentioned three key leaders in connection to the movement: former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) President Ali Nasser Mohamed, former PDRY Prime Minister Haider Abu

Bakr al-Attas and former Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) Hadramout Secretary General Hassan Ba'um. Tammah said that although their views on the future of the south differ slightly, Ali Nasser and Attas remain in close contact. When asked who would be the leader of a potential independent South Yemen, Tammah immediately answered that Ali Nasser, who still has a substantial following among current and former military and civilian officials from the south, would be the most likely choice. Tammah said Ba'um, who has garnered popular support across the south as an anti-regime hero, is in hiding in Yafa and, with his health failing, wants to seek medical treatment abroad. (Note: London-based separatist news Web site Aden Press reported that Ba'um, who is known to suffer from heart problems, underwent an unspecified "minor surgical procedure" in Yafa in late February. End Note.)

STRANGE BED-FELLOWS? THE SOUTH, AL-QAEDA AND THE HOUTHIS

¶4. (S) Tammah provided some insight into the relationship between the Southern Movement and Yemen's other elements of domestic instability - the Houthis and al-Qaeda. According to Tammah, Abdulmalik al-Houthi has called the leaders of the Southern Movement to suggest cooperative action against the regime. To date, the movement's leaders have rejected al-Houthi's offer for fear of losing support from Saudi Arabia. However, the Southern Movement is poised to take advantage of renewed fighting in Saada, which would distract the ROYG and increase the relative strength of the south. (Comment: Recent flare-ups in Saada point to a sixth round of fighting as an increasingly likely scenario. End Comment.) Tammah, a member of the Yafa tribe that spans al-Qaeda territory in Lahj and Abyan, also described a complex

relationship between the Southern Movement and al-Qaeda. He expressed concern that the regime could deploy religious extremists against its domestic opposition as it has in the past, and worried that the area of al-Ja'ar was overrun by religious extremists who operated outside the rule of law. On the other hand, Tammah described the ROYG as a common foe that in some ways makes the Southern Movement and al-Qaeda allies. Tammah implied contact between the two sides that established a status quo of mutual disengagement. He also described how both al-Qaeda and the Southern Movement have similar survival tactics, such as permitting supporters to loot government facilities and sell equipment for cash.

COMMENT

¶5. (S) General Tammah's comments paint the most complete picture to date of the Southern Movement's recent trajectory. His comments, however, must be considered in light of an as-yet-unidentified agenda. Although Tammah seems to be a credible contact whose information is corroborated by other sources, his motivation for speaking so openly to U.S. officials about the Southern Movement's secessionist agenda remains a significant question. END COMMENT

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

¶6. (S) Prior to unification, General Mohamed Saleh Tammah served as the commander of a mechanized battalion in the army of the former PDRY. From 1990-1994, he was a close advisor to Minister of Defense Haitham Qasim Taher in the unity government. When civil war broke out in 1994, Tammah returned to fight for the south. He lived in the U.S. from 1995 until 2008, during which time he became an American citizen. Tammah returned to Yemen in late 2008 to participate in the Southern Movement. He is originally from Yafa and is a member of the Yafa tribe, which spans parts of Lahj and Abyan governorates. Tammah speaks Arabic, English and Russian.

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